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Opening Statement by Ranking Member Price

FY 2012 Budget Hearing for Transportation Security Administration

March 15, 2011

Welcome Administrator Pistole to your first appearance before this Subcommittee, to present your budget request for fiscal year 2012. You've been serving as Administrator for about nine months, at a time when the aviation sector continues to be a prized target for Al Qaeda and other extremists. The Christmas Day 2009 and Times Square attempted bombings occurred before you were head of TSA, but you had recently taken the helm when the attempted bombings of cargo aircraft occurred last October, so I know you have felt firsthand the pressure of these ever evolving threats. Your agency is the last line of defense for our aviation sector, and while significant improvements have been made, the high threat environment we face makes plain the need to close any critical gaps that remain.

I know you share the view that effective security is smart security, and that we should be in the business of managing risk rather than trying to do the impossible by seeking to eliminate risk. While our aviation security model has improved over the years, it remains very cumbersome and, in the view of many, rather invasive. And while there are only a few signs of that system changing based on the 2012 budget, I'm encouraged by the willingness you have expressed to consider ways to reform this system to be more risk-based in the future.

The 2012 request, which totals \$8.1 billion overall, includes \$460 million above the 2010 level to secure our nation's airports and flights and to protect other modes of transportation. This request continues activities that were ramped up after the Christmas Day bombing attempt. I am pleased to see additional funding to detect non-metallic threats with Advanced Imaging Technology machines, which we anticipate will include a new feature to automatically recognize threats instead of relying on screeners to look at a person's outline. This should enhance privacy and hopefully speed up the time passengers spend at the checkpoint. I am also

pleased to note additional funding for other technologies at the checkpoint, such as portable explosive trace machines, so that we can more rapidly detect potential threats. The budget request also includes funds to expand watchlist vetting to make sure that we are catching persons that may want to do us harm before they board an airplane. And finally, I am pleased to note an expansion of the visible intermodal protection and response teams (VIPR), which supplement security on local passenger rail and mass transit systems, as well as support special events.

I also want to register some concerns about your request. For example, funding for air cargo security declines in 2012 even though TSA has been asked to take on greater responsibilities after the attempted air cargo bombing plot out of Yemen last fall -- and indeed to expedite the deadline by two years for screening all international cargo carried on passenger aircraft. The budget request also appears to rehash a substantial request first proposed in 2011 for additional behavior detection officers. Until we can understand what changes you have made to address critical vulnerabilities raised by the National Academy of Sciences and the Government Accountability Office about the Behavior Detection program, it may be premature to grow this program by roughly 10 percent. And finally, while the budget request increases funding for the Federal Air Marshals, your agency has still not addressed questions this Subcommittee posed almost eighteen months ago about what the appropriate staffing levels are. The report we received on this mandate was simply inadequate.

Administrator Pistole, I want to thank you for your service to our country. I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure our transportation security professionals are equipped with the resources they need to keep the American people safe. As we begin this hearing to more closely examine your 2012 budget, it's important to note that no program or account will be off limits to scrutiny. Our obligation is to take a balanced, realistic approach; to weigh risks carefully, and make prudent investments. I have no doubt that you share this point of view, and I look forward to your testimony.